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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000118

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SUBJECT: NINEWA: AL-HADBA CANDIDATES IN WEST NINEWA TELL
OF KDP INTIMIDATION

Classified By: PMIN Robert Ford reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

This is a Ninewa Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT)
message.

11. (C) Summary: Al-Hadba candidates in Western Ninewa told visiting PMIN and MND-N DCG January 7 that the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) is intimidating them and their supporters through arbitrary arrests and beatings. Murad Kishto, a Yezidi from Khanasur, Sinjar district, said that he has been arrested and tortured numerous times over the last six months by Kurdish officers of the Iraqi Army. Ahmed Awad Ali, a Sunni Arab from Zummar, Tel Afar district, said that many of his supporters have been arrested by Kurdish secret police (Assayish). Both candidates also said they were worried that the KDP will manipulate the Public Distribution System (PDS) to register Kurdish voters who are not residents of Ninewa. In a separate meeting, the KDP representative for Western Ninewa, Sarbast Terwanishi, responded to our cautions by claiming that the KDP has done nothing to intimidate or harass Hadba candidates. Terwanishi pledged an election season free of incident. Embassy and PRT's assessment is that some of the Hadba candidates' claims of KDP-inspired intimidation have merit, but we cannot yet confirm the most serious allegations. End Summary.

AL HADBA CANDIDATES ACCUSE KDP OF INTIMIDATION

12. (C) On January 7, PMIN and Deputy Commanding General for Multi-National Division North met with two Al Hadba candidates from western Ninewa at the house of the top Shammar Sheikh in the province, Sheikh Abdullah al-Yawr. Kishto said he has been arrested many times by what he termed as Kurdish elements of the Third Iraqi Army Division (3IAD). Kishto stated he had been arrested three times since opening his office for Hadba in Khanasur on June 1, 2008. In the most recent incident, in early December, Kishto said the he was taken by Kurdish officers of the 3IAD from his house. According to Kishto, the Kurdish officers severely beat his family and guards, fracturing the arm and skull of one of his small children. Kishto also showed us pictures of himself which he said were taken after he was beaten earlier in the year by the same Kurdish officers. (In the photos, his face showed obvious signs of beating.)

13. (C) In addition, Kishto said that he receives constant threats to himself, his home and family, and his office. For instance, Kishto said that on January 5 he received a threat that someone would throw a bomb into his house. Kishto also said that people who meet with him are continually arrested and/or threatened. Kishto concluded by saying that he is seriously considering quitting the campaign.

14. (C) Ali also said the KDP intimidated and physically attacked his supporters. According to Ali, the Assayish recently arrested some of his campaign workers, breaking the

arm of one of them. The campaign workers, who were released on January 6, said they were all told not to vote, according to Ali. (Note: Earlier in the visit, Sheikh Abdullah himself also said the Assayish had detained Hadba campaign workers.) Ali said that his campaign posters are routinely torn down the same day they are put up. Ali said the perpetrators avoid prosecution by paying minors a few dollars remove the posters, an allegation similar to others we have heard in other parts of Iraq.

¶5. (C) In addition to the campaign violence, both Ali and Q5. (C) In addition to the campaign violence, both Ali and Kishto accused the KDP of trying to rig elections by falsifying PDS cards, which are also known as "ration cards." (Note: The voters roll for each polling station is compiled by IHEC from the records of the PDS, run by the Ministry of Trade, whose minister is from the Da'wa party. Presenting a PDS card alone will not furnish permission to vote at a polling place. End note.) Ali said that there was an "unnatural" increase of 15,000 ration card holders in Zummar last month. Kishto said that the KDP was trying to forge ration cards for Kurdish soldiers in Sinjar. Both Kishto and Ali said they wanted close Coalition supervision of voting on Election Day, to ensure legitimacy. Sheikh Abdullah also said Coalition supervision was needed to lend legitimacy to the elections.

KDP IN WESTERN NINEWA DENIES ANY WRONDOING

¶6. (C) Earlier in the day, PMIN DCG had met with Sinjar KDP chief Sarbast in Sinjar to communicate the U.S.'s grave

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concern about reports of elections violence. PMIN stressed that it is in the KDP's interest that the election is viewed as credible and legitimate. PMIN cautioned that if Arab voters think the election is rigged it will only strengthen the hand of AQI and other insurgents. PMIN added that the KDP's reputation, both in Iraq and in the world, would be damaged if it is linked to elections violence.

¶7. (C) Bionote: Sarbast Terwanishi is a former Peshmerga commander who, according to local sources, has a reputation for tolerating little if any political opposition to the KDP in western Ninewa. His official position is head of KDP Branch 17, headquartered in Sinjar.

¶8. (C) Without prompting, Sarbast brought up Kishto, saying that the warrant for his arrest originated in Prime Minister Maliki's office. The mayor of Sinjar, Dakhel Qasem Hassan, who was also present, said that Kishto was arrested for working for a foreign intelligence agency (Syria), using a false passport, bribing voters, and smuggling goods from Syria, including livestock. Sarbast went on to say that anyone who would make such allegations was in league with AQI. Sarbast also said that Kishto works for Syrian Intelligence. Sarbast said that despite Sinjar's ethnic diversity, there has been no sectarian violence, or terrorist incidents, in Sinjar since the KDP took over in 2003. Sarbast guaranteed to us that there would be no election-related malfeasance in Western Ninewa.

¶9. (C) Comment: Embassy and PRT's assessment is that at least some of the accusations of Kurdish intimidation have merit, although we lack independent verification of the most serious allegations. Verification of any of the claims is made more difficult by the current political and security situation, but some of the accusations of Kishto and Ali are not inconsistent with reported KDP election tactics elsewhere in Ninewa. Embassy and PRT will continue to send a coordinated message to Iraqi authorities and political parties telling them that intimidation, harassment or other types of election malfeasance will jeopardize the credibility and ultimately the utility of the elections themselves. End

comment.

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